

CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY LANGUAGE

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الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة التداخل مابين اللغة والادب من جهة واللغة الادبية والاسلوب الادبي من جهة اخرى. هل هناك لغة ادبية ام لا هو سؤال يطرح باستمرار ولكن لايمكن ان يطرح بمعزل عن الاسئلة الخاصة بمعاهية الاسلوب الادبي نفسه او من وجهة نظر تعليمية حيث يتم تدريس مادتي الادب واللغة. يضم البحث كذلك مقارنة مابين اللغة الادبية واللغة غير الادبية.

Abstract

This paper investigates the interface between language and literature on the one hand and literary language and literariness on the other. Whether there is a literary language or not is a question that is consistently addressed, but it is one which cannot be addressed in isolation either from questions concerning the nature of literature itself or from the institutional contexts (i.e. schools) where literature and language are taught. The study includes a comparison between literary and non-literary language.

Key words: literature, literary language, literariness, stylistic variation, defamiliarization, deviation theory.

1.1 Introduction

Generally speaking, literary language is the language of literature and thus it is used in literary texts. This may cause problems. One problem is that the term 'literature' itself is subject to constant change. In the history of English literature, according to Carter (1997: 123), the term 'literature' has meant different things at different times: from elevated treatment of venerable subjects (fifteenth century), to simply writing in the broadest sense of the word (e.g. diaries, travelogues, historical and biographical accounts) (eighteenth century), to the sense of creative, highly imaginative literature appropriated under the influence of romantic theories of literature by Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis in the last hundred years. As such, literature is not universally the same everywhere and is as a category of text eminently negotiable (Ibid.).

1.2 What is Literariness?

Historically speaking, Jakobson was the first who coined the term 'Literariness' considering it one of the characterizing properties of a text (Erlich, 1981: 628). Russian Formalists hold that literariness stands for linguistic and formal properties which discriminate non-literary or ordinary language from literary one. Roman Jakobson 1919, a leading formalist, states that "the object of literary science is not

literature but literariness, that is, what makes a given work a literary work". Instead of searching for abstract qualities such as imagination to be the source of literariness, the formalists embark to determine the noticeable features which literary texts use to "foreground their own language" via meter, rhyme, repetition and other patterns. Literariness is defined in relation to defamiliarization which is a chain of deviations from "ordinary" language or a linguistic dislocation or a 'making strange'. Accordingly, it relates different uses of language, where the contrasted uses are prone to alter according to different contexts (Internet source 1).

Zwaan (1993: 7-15) disagrees upon defining literariness as a "characteristic set of text properties" and also upon regarding it as the outcome of exploiting a set of conventions. For him, literariness can be seen as the result of a "distinctive mode of reading", represented by three key components: **stylistic variation, defamiliarization and modification of personal meaning**.

Van Peer (1991: 315) purports that the function of the theory of literariness is to "describe and explain a number of fundamental issues of literature in a powerful and elegant way".

Miall and Kuiken (1998: 121-38) refer to some studies that offer confirmation favouring this understanding of literariness. They start with one reader's explanation of a moment while reading, which displays an indication of the three literariness components highlighted by Zwaan (1993: 7-15).

In an empirical study, Miall and Kuiken (2001: 289-301) asked a number of readers of two poems of Coleridge to state their comments on the passages that they realized as striking in these poems. They (Ibid.) concentrate on the commentary of one participant on the first lines from "The Nightingale": "No cloud, no relique of the sunken day / Distinguishes the West..." One of the readers explains why (s)he considers that passage salient:

Because of the way that he says a 'sunken day' and there is 'no relique'; so there's nothing there. I like it because it's unusual to see the days sunken, instead of the sun. I think that's what gives it its sense of desolation. I just picture this huge, huge expanse of sky with really nothing else on the horizon. There's also kind of a sense of timelessness; because reliques are something that are old and sunken, it sounds like a sunken ship, something that's been there for hundreds of years and nobody knows about it, but it's something that's happening right now and it's kind of before dark but after day. It's just kind of a nothing time, well not a nothing time but a time that can't be described, that can't be categorized. (Miall and Kuiken, 1998: 1-2)

1.3 Components of Literary Reading

In the reader's comments mentioned in 1.2, three components that compose literariness are detected:

1. Stylistic Variation

The first component of literariness would be the presence of stylistic variations. Stylistic variation

is the existence of certain "variations that are distinctively associated with literary texts: a metaphor 'sunken day' and an archaic, polysemous noun 'relique' in Coleridge poem *The Nightingale*" (Miall and Kuiken, 1999: 123).

2. Defamiliarization

Defamiliarization is the second component of literariness. It is unusual that the days sunken, rather than the sun. It is more typical or familiar that the phrase '*the sunken sun*', be replaced by a phrase that shakes the reader's conventional perception of '*the sun faded day*'.

3. Modification of Personal Meaning

This component designates the transformation or modification of a conventional concept or feeling. A reader is invited to reflect on implications of defamiliarizing phrases like: "*a nothing time . . . a time that can't be described, that can't be categorized.*" Such implications do not sound vivid directly because a number of images and feelings are retrieved before arriving at a judgment (Miall and Kuiken, 1998: 122). In other words, the reader has been provoked to put in place a new sense of time, but the difficulty in finding the appropriate words attests to the reinterpreting effort required. Each component of literariness may occur separately. For example, advertisements often utilize salient stylistic features; certain events may hasten the transformation of conventional feelings and concepts. The key to literariness is the interaction of these components (Ibid.: 123). The three components of literariness can be elaborated in the following way. Literary texts encompass features that stand out from ordinary uses of language or are "foregrounded" (Mukarovsky's term, 1964). Stylistic features can be deployed within noun phrases; however, foregrounding may also be evident within narrative structures, through devices that provide shifts in point of view, deformations of the temporal framework, or insights into character perspective through free indirect discourse. There is an extensive tradition of theorizing about literary language starting from British romantic writers such as Coleridge and Shelley, through the Russian formalists, the Prague Linguistic Circle, to more recent work by Leech, Fowler, Short, Widdowson, and others (reviewed by Van Peer, 1986). Iser (1978: 92-3) asserts the presence of unexpected gaps in literary language showing how readers are driven to construct their own network of meanings, working beyond the *referential* to an *aesthetic* encoding of the text.

1.4 Literature vs. Literariness

'What is literature?' is a complex and elusive question, and critics agree that there is no objective definition of the concept. The notions of literature have changed over the centuries depending on what

society regarded as literature at a certain point in time. Prior to 1800 the term 'literature' meant 'everything written in a language, artistic or not' (Eagleton, 1983: 10). In our modern use 'literature' appears more as a descriptive term that refers to creative writing such as poetry, novels, drama, short stories, prose - with acknowledged artistic value. The values a society assigns to its literature vary from society to society, from age to age, and thus the functions that literature serves in society, such as entertainment, moral didactic, national identity or social critique, vary (Ibid.). Culler (1997: 20) states that defining literature as "whatever a given society treats as literature" is unsatisfying, as it leaves the definition of literature up to how somebody decides to read, not to the nature of what is written. Culler (Ibid) proposes to ask a different question: "What makes us treat something as literature?"

This question leads us directly to the concept of 'literariness', which emphasizes that the defining features of a literary work reside in its form. Thus, in 1919 the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson makes the following statement: "The subject of literary science is not literature, but literariness, i.e. that which makes a given work a literary work". He suggests that literature is definable because it uses language in peculiar ways. Literariness is thus the organization of language that distinguishes literary from non-literary texts: it is transforming and intensifying ordinary speech, bringing the focus of the reader to language itself, often with an estranging or defamiliarizing effect [See Eagleton (1996: 2) and Culler (1997: 35)].

1.5 Literary Language

According to Carter (1997: 124), the history of definitions of literary language is a long and battle-scarred one with various interest groups competing for power over the property; and each definition has itself inevitably assumed a theory of literature whether explicitly recognised or admitted to be one or not. Two main camps can be discerned and these can be grouped into *formalist* and *functionalist* though the division is by no means a clear-cut one.

1.5.1 Formalism

Carter (1997: 124) indicates that formalist definitions, especially those of the Russian formalists, implied a division between *poetic* and *practical* language. They attempted to set up a *science*, a *poetics* of literature which sought to define the literariness of literature, i.e., they wanted to isolate the specifically literary forms and properties of texts. Russian formalists argued that, since there is no exclusively literary content, poetics should substantiate a concern with the **how** rather than the **what**. Thus, the early formalists such as Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Eichenbaum and Jakobson granted special attention to the linguistic constituents of the literary medium, language, and depicted the new science of

linguistics for their theoretical and descriptive apparatus. Their chief point was that literary language is a deviant language and a theory which has had considerable influence (Ibid.).

1.5.2 Deviation Theory

Carter (1997: 124) asserts that literariness inheres in how much language use deviates from the expected configurations and normal patterns of language which defamiliarizes the reader. Language use in literature is, thus, different since it makes our 'normal' view of things strange, and it generates new or renewed perceptions. For example, the phrase '*a grief ago*' could be poetic because of its deviation from the semantic selection restrictions which indicate that only temporal nouns such as 'a week' or 'a month' may occur in such phrases. Accordingly, *grief* is to be perceived, here, as a temporal process (Ibid.). Deviation theory, then, may represent a definition of literary language which contains interesting insights, but which on close inspection bears some problems. For example:

1. Deviation can only be measured if the norm from which the deviation occurs is stated. What is the norm? Is the norm the standard language, the internally constituted norms created within a single text, the norms of a particular genre, a particular writer's style, the norms created by a school of writers within a period? And so on. If it is the norms of the standard language, then what level of language is involved: grammar, phonology, discourse, and semantics? A deviation at one level may be norm adherence at another level (Ibid.: 125).
2. What is defamiliarising in a certain period may not be in another.
3. There is a tendency to discover literariness in the more maximally deviant forms, i.e., poetry rather than prose, avant-garde (=ultramodern, ahead of its time, pioneers) rather than naturalist drama, in, for example, e.e. cummings and Dylan Thomas rather than in Wordsworth's Lucy poems or George Eliot's shorter fiction (Ibid.).
4. It also presupposes a distinction between *poetic* and *practical* language which is not overtly demonstrated. It can easily be shown that deviation routinely occurs in everyday language and in discourses not usually associated with literature. Similarly; in some historical periods, literature was defined by *adherence to* rather than *deviation from* literary and linguistic norms (Ibid.).

1.5.3 Self-Referentiality

Roman Jakobson is celebrated for another influential formalist definition. Jakobson (1960: 236 and Tse, 2011: 237) enunciate a poetic language theory that stresses the self-referentiality of such language. According to this, literariness results when language invites the attention to its own status as

a sign and when, eventually, there is an emphasis on the message for its own sake. Easthope (1983:15) states that poetic function adds into the syntagmatic axis something which would typically stay outside in the paradigmatic axis: this is done by operating a choice in favour of something that repeats what is already in the syntagmatic axis, thus reinforcing it. In the example:

(6) I **hate** horrible Harry or I **like** Ike. (Carter, 1997: 124)

Carter (Ibid.) clarifies that the verbs **hate** and **like** are chosen in favour of '*loathe*' or '*support*' since they establish a reinforcing phonoaesthetic patterning. The above example shows that literariness may inhere in such everyday language as political advertising slogans. Carter (Ibid.) holds that according to Jakobson, in non-literary discourse, the "signifier is only a vehicle for the signified" whereas in literary discourse, it is brought into a more active relationship which serve to "symbolise the signified as well as to refer to it".

Carter (Ibid.) points out that the criteria presented by Jakobson work in the field of poetry better than in prose; there are no clear criteria that determine the degrees of literariness in his examples and that Jakobson focuses heavily on the production of effects, neglecting the role of the receiver of the message. (For related discussion, see Werth, 1999)

1.5.4 Literariness in Language

Carter (1997: 197) considers literary language as a "*continuum*, a *cline* of literariness in language use with some uses of language being marked as more literary than others". A cline resembles continuum in that they describe a relationship along a certain dimension which is made of degrees instead of discrete cut-off points (Carter, 2004: 237). Literariness is seen as a matter of degree, as it were.

Although the immediate focus is on text linguistic features, it will not be forgotten that whether the reader chooses to read a text in a literary way, as a literary text as it were, is one decisive factor of its literariness. For example, Smith (1978:67) discusses how the first line of a newspaper article on Hell's Angels can, when arranged in a particular lineation, be read and interpreted for all kinds of different literary meanings:

(7) Most Angels are uneducated.

Only one

Angel in ten has steady work.

1.6 Criteria for Literariness

Carter (1997: 128-35) modifies the criteria for stipulating literariness in language. The criteria help specify that one text is more or less literary than another. In this way, these criteria may also determine *degrees* of literariness.

1.6.1 Medium Dependence

The meaning of this concept is that "the more literary a text, the less it will be dependent for its reading on another medium" (Tse, 2011: 238). This means that a text may depend on a clue or code to illustrations, abbreviations and the like that are used in it. There is no text that can be exclusively self-sufficient that it points merely to itself nor be it so autonomous that a reader's experience cannot extend the world it creates. To use Carter's words (1997: 129), the text is sovereign. It requires no necessary supplementation.

1.6.2 Re-registration

This notion means that all words and stylistic features or registers will be excluded from a literary context. Registers such as the language of instructions or the legal language are to be fit between language specific function and form; however, any language may be adequate to literary effect by the process of re-registration. Re-registration denotes that all resources of the language are to be exploited for literary purposes (Ibid.: 123-9).

1.6.3 Semantic Density

This notion designates that the text is considered as more literary when more superimposed levels at work than a text where fewer levels at work or where they do not interact heavily. There are various linguistic levels at work in texts. We have a degree of semantic density which is distinct from one text to another and which stems from an interactive among the levels of syntax, lexis, phonology, and text.

1.6.4 Polysemy

The existence of polysemy in literary texts is one of the main points which have been widely discussed. A text is polysemic when lexical items may have more than one meaning: "call of the East" (the actual sense of 'sound' or 'expressing yearning, desire or longing for'); "smooth...American cars" (the sense of 'surface metal' or, 'the personality of their owners'), "dark world" (the sense of 'lack of light and mysterious' or 'uncivilized').

One characteristic of the polysemic text is then that its lexical items are always open to denotations and they are always open for being transformed into connotations, contents are never received for their

own sake but rather as a sign vehicle for something else (Carter, 1997: 134).

1.6.5 Displaced Interaction

This notion serves to help distinguish the direct speech acts of a text, in which readers will actually perform the actions described in the sequence depicted in the route itself, from the more indirect or displaced speech acts transmitted in another text (Ibid.: 135).

1.6.6 Text Patterning

At the text level, degrees of literariness can be discerned with the help of particular effects that can be located in the discourse itself.

In the text below, patterning at the level of discourse occurs by virtue of repetition of the expressions of place. Thus, reference to the *river* and *town* is made as follows:(8)

"The river Lanchap gives the state its name.

As the Sungai Lanchap winds on...

As the Lanchap approaches the coast...

Where the Lanchap meets the Sungai, Hantu is the royal town...

This is Kuala Hantu " (deBeaugrande and Dressler, 1981:155)

The repetition of some syntactic patterns of *clause* and *tense* helps to endorse the lasting existence and progress of the river and to support the "appearance of the town as if the reader were really in a journey through the jungle towards the town". (Tse, 2011: 237)

1.7 Literary Language vs. Instrumental Language

Many attempts have been made to distinguish the language of literature from that of non-literature. For instance, in "The Burning Fountain", Wheelwright (1955: 3-4) differentiates between "steno-language," or "literal language", and "depth" or "expressive language". He mentions two significant points which are worth noting. The first point is related to the distinctive characteristics attributed to these two categories of language. Thus, Wheelwright (Ibid.: 73) stresses that "the differentiation is by no means absolute but admits of the most varied and subtle degrees, disguises, and overlapping". Literary language and instrumental language are present in all types of discourse; the differences may only be in terms of proportion. Wheelwright (Ibid: 74) defines steno-language as "the negative limit of expressive language". It is impossible for literary language and instrumental language to exist separately in pure forms. To define instrumental language as the negative boundary of literary language may provide a fruitful way to perceive both.

1.8 A Demarcation of Literary Language

A literary text shows a tendency for the use of literary language. Literary language cannot be delimited by exploring certain works. Literature is a body of texts that recurrently employ literary language. Thus, the definition of literary language is both descriptive and prescriptive. This entails that the definition of literary language is based on the concept of multiple meaning or polysemy (<http://www.sp.uconn.edu>).

1.9 Literary and Non-Literary Discourse

In recent years, no systematic distinction is made between literary and non-literary discourse. Literary discourse differs from ordinary conversation and some written discourse since any published work is subject to a process of careful composition and much revision. Even in fictional dialogue the slips of the tongue, repetitions, elisions and opaque reference which characterize the spoken language are seldom represented, save occasionally for humorous effect or to give an impression of authenticity. Smith (1988: 15) states that "literary value is not the property of an object or a subject but, rather, the product of the dynamics of a system". Nevertheless, she (Ibid.:16) continues that because we "have particular interests, we will, at any given moment, be viewing it from some perspective". These interests arise from literary reading instead of modeling it in advance. Thus, a reader will recurrently find distinctive narrative and stylistic features in a text finding them outstandingly defamiliarizing. The conventional perspective of the reader does not function as a guide to the reading experience, but it engenders the literariness of the text.

1.10 Conclusion

The study concludes that there is an interface between language and literature on the one hand and literary language and literariness on the other. The study indicates also that literariness has three components: stylistic variation, defamiliarization and modification of personal meaning, and these components, together or in isolation, compose our concept of literary language or literariness. The criteria that help stipulate literariness are medium dependence, re-registration, semantic density, polysemy, displaced interaction and text patterning.

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(Demarcation of Literary language)